

THE CONVICT.

A Lady Relates a Romantic Story of Love and Crime.

AIDS No. 67 TO ESCAPE

While Waiting to Elope with the Warden's Son—The Sequel of the Adventure and the Reward from the Sweetheart of the Escaped Prisoner—How "Jim" Won His Bride—A Tale of Prison Life.

I shall never forget the first time I went to the prison.

It was a hot Sunday in July, and I had just been engaged by the soprano of a church choir, that went up to the penitentiary every Sunday to sing for the prisoners.

I shuddered as we passed through

hungerly to receive us, as so many

times they had opened to swallow up

some wretched criminal forever.

As we walked up the broad stone

steps, and into the office, the warden's

son came to meet us; he was a handsome

fellow, and dressed in a suit of

light tweeds, he looked a dashing con-

trast to his dismal surroundings.

"Hello, Jim, old boy," said our organ-

ist, "Come here and let me introduce

you to our new soprano, Miss Arling-

ton."

The tall, well-formed chap came over

to us and taking my hand in his, look-

ed down into my eye with a smile, and

in that first meeting glance, I knew

it was all up with me. No one ever

had such glorious blue eyes as Jim, and

when they flashed down into mine,

my heart gave a queer throb that I

had never felt before, and never felt

again, until—the next time I saw him.

He conducted us to the dreary chapel

where the prisoners were held, and

here sat row after row of sad-

faced men, all clad in the degrading

stripes of the prison uniform. It was

a novel experience for me, and the

scene had a most depressing effect

upon my mind. I could not bear to see

those luckless malefactors herded to-

gether like so many animals, and I

wondered if in that melancholy gath-

ering some were not innocent; and the

horrible thought of such a fate caused

me to look again, with a morbid curi-

osity, at the hundreds of sombre

shaven faces turned toward me.

One convict in particular attracted

my attention; a man what sat at the

end of the bench directly in front of

me. His chin rested on a shapely

hand, his dark eyes seemed to burn

under heavy brows, while the regula-

tion prison hair-cut seemed in his

case to serve only to accentuate the

beauty of a well-formed head.

When I sang "The Holy City," he

sat with those big melancholy eyes

fixed on mine, and I could have sworn

that I saw tears gather in them; and

this, in connection with the thoughts

that must arise in every breast at the

sight of so many unfortunates, shut

away from all that is sunny or good in

life, caused me to become so nervous

that my voice trembled pitifully in the

last hymn, and I was heartily glad

when the services were at an end.

We were invited to walk through

the prison, and although I had no de-

sire to penetrate further into the gre-

vous place, the others wished to do so,

and I assented; with the better grace

perhaps when I found that Jim was to

be my escort.

We walked together through those

cheerless halls, little thinking that we

should walk so, side by side for life;

and in passing, we saw the poor

wretches at their recreation hour—

recreation—good heavens! what a trav-

esty on the world! those pale-faced men

standing in silent groups, hardly dar-

ing to raise an eye as we walked by

them.

As we crossed the stone-paved yard,

I noticed the same dark-eyed prisoner

that had interested me in the chapel,

and, to my surprise, as we passed him,

I saw my escort raise his hat, while

the convict stood with downcast look,

and only acknowledged the salutation

by raising his hand to his head as in

a military salute.

When we were outside the gate, I asked

Jim who he was, and why he was

treated with more respect than his fel-

lows.

"It's against the rules to tell the

names of any of the prisoners," said he,

but that chap has no more business in

stripes than I have this minute; I

tell you," he continued vehemently,

"our great American law some times

makes justice in its decrees."

I saw that he was excited, and some

of his enthusiasm communicated itself

to me, as I entreated him to tell me the

story of the man.

"I really shouldn't do so," replied he,

"but you are such an eloquent pleader

that I am tempted to break the rules

and tell you the poor fellow's pitiful

story. He is a millionaire, young, as

you see; and when he first came here,

two years ago, I thought he was the

finest looking chap that I had ever

seen. This life is killing to him, espe-

cially one used to outdoor life, and

exercise as he has been, and I can

see how he is failing, and the con-

finement is telling on his magnificent

physique.

"Three months before he came here,

he went to New York from his ranch

out West, where he owns acres of

fertile land and herds of full-blooded

stock worth fortunes in themselves.

Well, it was the old story. He met a

girl, a lovely bud of society, and it was

a case of love at first sight on both

sides, the only trouble being that she

had another admirer, a politician, who

sought to win her hand through the

political aspirations of her father. The

old man loved position and party

power, but when his daughter's happi-

ness stood in the balance, he relin-

quished every cherished wish of his

own, to insure the life-happiness of his

beloved child.

"The politician, who had made boasts

of ultimately winning the girl, grew

insanely jealous of the handsome

young athlete that had cut him out,

and sought in every conceivable way

to annoy him, even going so far as to

utter scandalous assertions about the

young lady, who every one knew was a charming and innocent girl. These scurrilous sayings came in time to the ears of her fiancée, who immediately started out to call the lying scoundrel to account, finding him at last at the Metropolitan Club, of which he was a member.

"They met at the head of the stairs leading to the hall, and the Westerner faced his cowardly rival with the assertion that he, as well as others there, knew where true. The politician, looking around at some of his parasites, who he thought would protect him, repeated the insult to the girl—just once—for as the lie left his lips, the Westerner laid struck out with his right, and landed him fair on the temple. He went down like an ox struck by the hammer, and before any of his astonished friends could stay him, rolled heavily down the stairs, striking his head on the marble floor at the bottom, lay there—dead—while the throng of startled clubmen held the Westerner till the police came and took him to the cell he only left to come here after the trial.

"The trial, did I say?—the farce, it should be called; for not one witness appeared for this poor chap, while the court was packed with friends of the dirty deceased, who clamored to avenge the death of their leader, and were only mollified when the sentence came at last—'States Prison for life!'

"The girl he loved so well came to him every day, and remained till the last, and every visiting day since he came here, has brought her, with her white-haired father, to cheer the poor fellow as best she can with the assurance of ever constant affection. Poor thing! It would break your heart to see her, always here before the doors are open; always the last to leave when they close. She grew so pale and wretched this spring that he begged her father to take her away, so they went to Switzerland, and now a letter comes for him by every ship. I took a fancy to the poor devil and as he is one of the best prisoners here, and in special favor, I have him in the office with me, and we have become great friends.

"But see, I have made you sad; I'm sorry. It's like my dundering stupidity to entertain a sweet young lady with a tale of woe that—"

"No, no," I cried, "only I am sorry for the poor fellow," and I tried vainly to hold back the tears that were streaming down my face.

Well, that was how I met Jim; and that burst of confidence brought us together from the very first, and as he wiped the tears from my eyes that day, so he has continued to clear away the sorrows that have crossed my path since then.

As I said before, Jim was the warden's son, and he kept the prison books for his father. We were fond of each other from the first day and whenever I went to the prison to sing, we walked through the grounds, as the stroll gave us time for conversation. My father had taken a violent dislike to Jim, and forbidden me to ask him to the house, as he was desirous of my making what he termed a "good match," which meant lots of money, and a supreme disregard of what might accompany it; so for a while our only chance for love-making and I must say that we progressed very well, considering the gloomy surroundings.

I found that Jim had quite an affection for "No. 67," the dark-eyed convict, and I felt great pity for the young chap, and one day took him a bunch of old-fashioned posies. Jim said he fondled them like a child, and said they were like the flowers that grew in his mother's garden, and then he talked of her, and thanked God that the gentle lady had died before disgrace came to the one she loved so well.

At last the summer wore to an end, and Jim became more importunate in his love-making. He grew despondent, and said that if I really loved him, the best way, in fact, was only way for our happiness, was to elope. I cried, and could not bear the thought, but I knew my stern father too well to think he would change, and mother and the rest of the family were afraid of him; so I balanced the thing in a mental scale; on one side were the home folks, and on the other—my Jim—and the "Jim" side flopped down in the balance, and the home-folks flew away up out of sight, so I said yes, and then Jim kissed me, and we sat down to talk it over.

The penitentiary stood at the outskirts of the town, just where the city pavement began to disappear into the green-edged country roads. Two of these there were, one running by the howling walls of the ugly prison, the other crossing this, like a broad white ribbon, rolled out into leafy woods, over a little railway bridge, past a picturesque station and then on to the next town, some four miles distant. Adjoining the prison grounds in the rear, was an old estate, once one of the glories of the country, now fallen into decay, vacant and deserted. At the end of the garden near the prison wall, stood a little pavilion, a summer house of lattice work, which Jim discovered, and where he and I were wont to sit on a summer night, as no one could see us there, save the prison guard who paced up and down on the wide stone parapet over our heads. However, the night guard was big Dennis Rafferty, one of Jim's faithful admirers (by boy was the pet of all the prison employees, with his cheery ways and ever pleasant greetings), so little we cared if the burly chap with the gun did steal a glance down at us now and then, as we snuggled close together on the broken rustic bench in the old tumble-down pavilion.

Here we sat when we finally concluded to elope; here we made our plans, and this was the place selected for our meeting on that important occasion, which we planned for Thanksgiving eve. We knew every one would be too busy in the holiday preparations to notice us, and hoped that the spirit of the festive time would have its due effect on the stony heart of my stern parent. I was to pretend to visit my cousin (in quite an opposite direction), and ride up to the summer house, there to wait for Jim, who would come as soon as it was dark

enough to hide our movements. Then we were to wheel to the next town and be married, and after that—well, then for the family fireworks.

The night arrived, a cold November evening, with a brisk wind that drove the dead leaves in waves along the road, and spoke eloquently of a frost hidden somewhere up in the North. I reached the old house first according to agreement, and my, what a desolate place it looked in the chill autumn dusk! Jim had already visited the pavilion as the presence there of his raincoat and a package testified, so, as the light still lingered I turned up the collar of my jacket and sat down to wait his return.

It was growing colder, and the darkness of night settled slowly over the dreary scene about me. Behind, the long, dead grasses that overgrew the deserted grounds, shivered and whistled as the chill wind cut through them, while before me rose the formidable prison wall, on whose broad parapet stalked the one living thing in view, the prison guard.

I supposed I was nervous over my approaching elopement, and the eerie sound of the whistling wind, broken only by the monotonous tramp, tramp of the sentinel, now loud as he passed near me, now dying away as he continued to the end of the long wall, and turned the corner to the other side, seemed to get on my nerves, till I was ready to run home again, and leave poor Jim to elope by himself.

The cold edge of the moon rose slowly over dark clouds, and still I waited—no sign of Jim. I rose and stood by the door idly watching the broad silhouette of the guard outlined against the sky. Just as he disappeared from view around the corner, I saw a dark shadow on top of the wall in front of me; which slid over the stone side like a flash, and landed at my feet. Before I could give vent to the scream in my throat, the crouching form rose to my height, and I saw it was a man. At the same moment he spied me, and in an instant was at my side, with his hand over my mouth so I could not cry out.

I struggled desperately, for I felt that I was in the clutch of a criminal, and frantically wrestled to free my mouth so that I could scream to Dennis for help, but the man was powerful as a giant, and held me in a grip like iron. As we swayed back and forth in the pavilion, I could see the guard passing within call, yet could not free myself from that deadly grip, and as the light from my bicycle lamp flashed across him, I saw the convict stripes on the sleeve pressed across my mouth, and knew that I had to do with a desperate character indeed.

Realizing my position, and the tremendous power of my assailant, I lost heart, turned faint, and my head fell back on the criminal's rough shoulder. He bent over me and gasped, "For God's sake keep still, I won't hurt you; I'm only a poor devil making a run for my life."

As he spoke, the faint rays of the moon, coming out from under a cloud, fell directly on our faces, and showed me the dark eyes of Jim's friend. At the same time he recognized me, and whispered, "Why, it's Jim's friend, the little singer—thank God, I hope I haven't hurt you," he added, "I have only this chance for my whole life, so forgive me—you won't betray me, will you?"

I shook my head, and he quickly released me, and then as the tread of the returning sentry sounded, he said, "Keep still; don't move till he has passed; think what you would do if Jim were in my place," and he crouched at my side, and drew my skirt around him, as the moon, now rising rapidly, fell on the door of the pavilion and showed me plainly to the passing sentry. "The guards were forbidden to speak when on duty, but as big Dennis looked down, knowing well who I was, he waved his hand. At this friendly gesture I opened my mouth to cry out, but the convict held my hand in a vice-like grip, and whispered, "For Jim's sake—don't," and somehow the thought of that other woman, who loved him just as I did Jim, flashed across my mind, and I kept still, and waved my hand at Dennis who passed on, little dreaming of my predicament.

Close by the door of the pavilion stood my wheel, and as the guard's footsteps died away, the man in stripes straightened up, and said: "Little girl, this is my only chance—decide with you whether I go to freedom and the woman I love, or back to that living hell. Won't you help me to escape?—think what you would say if Jim were in my place!"

I hesitated, and he continued wildly, "How can you refuse?—think of the girl whose heart is breaking for me—if you only knew her—how she has prayed for me—how I love her—Good God!—it's her life as well as mine that I'm begging for—won't you help me?—for her sake?"

With a sudden burst of sympathy I turned toward him, and stretching out my hand, which he clasped eagerly, said, "Yes, I'll help you," just as the guard approached again, and as the poor devil drew my skirt around him once more, I heard him say, "Thank God, thank God!"

The danger past, he rose and whispered, "May I take your wheel?" "Yes, yes," I replied, "but you can never get away in these stripes." "I'm afraid it's all up," he said sadly, "I had forgotten them,"—and a look of agony passed over his face, as he groaned, "Oh, God, must I go back! Oh, Mabel, Mabel," and the tears rolled down his pale cheeks.

"Wait a moment," I whispered, and quickly snatched Jim's old rain coat, which lay on the seat, and dragged the sleeves over the outstretched arms of the convict. It fell to his feet, completely covering the prison suit, and I hastily took off my black fedora hat, and forced it onto his shaven head, then pointing to the road that led to the railway station I said, "If you ride fast you can catch the nine o'clock express, that stops at the Little station down the road," and pressed my purse (which contained all my savings) into his trembling hand.

"Quick, quick," I cried, as the shadow of a cloud passed again over the moon; he bent over and kissed my hand, saying fervently, as he did so,

"God bless you; you have saved my life and I shall never forget you, nor will she," and mounting the wheel he rode noiselessly into the gloom, while I stood learning against the door of the pavilion, half dead with fright.

It seemed to me that I stood there an hour, my heart beating so that I could almost hear it, though I pressed my cold hands over my breast to stifle the sound. In reality it was less than twenty minutes, when a big bell began to boom from the prison, and immediately I heard the sound of a cannon roar out on the quiet night—the signal of an escaped convict. I trembled like a leaf, and then my throat filled up as I heard the town clock strike nine, and I knew that if he had reached the train he was safe; and I prayed God, for the sake of the woman that loved him, that he was.

The confusion around me was tremendous; and as the big searchlight flashed from the prison tower, Jim came running through the garden, all excitement.

"Oh, Nell," he cried, "No. 67 has escaped; my friend, you know, and he aided under his breath, 'I hope he gets away!'"

Just then big Dennis came running towards us with the other guards and said, "Sure this lady can tell you that no man has ever come over this wall; she's been waiting here for the last hour and a half; excuse me, mam, but did you see anything in the shape of a man come over the wall?" And in the light of the lanterns I looked squarely at them and swore I had seen no one save the guard—and I think the lie was forgiven.

Such a commotion as ensued! Of course that put an end to all idea of an elopement, for the whole town was up in arms. Even the oldest inhabitant couldn't remember when a prisoner had escaped before. This convict had been given special privileges on account of good behavior, one of which was an outside single cell during the warm weather; and when the watchman had gone through the yard and looked up for the night he had in some way forgotten to properly secure the door of "No. 67." Most men would have been safe enough, but the athletic training of the big Westerner and his superb muscular control, had enabled him to scale the steep wall—a feat impossible of achievement by a man of ordinary strength.

The next morning my wheel was discovered behind a clump of bushes near the railway station, that led to the supposition that he had stolen it while I was seated in the pavilion, and so my presence there was thoroughly aired, to the infinite disgust of my father, who said that as I had compromised myself with that "worthless Jim" the best thing I could do was to marry him, and strange to say, for once in a lifetime I agreed with my father.

I never shall forget that Thanksgiving day! Jim and I talked it all over, and when I told him of the part I had played in his friend's escape, he went nearly wild with delight.

The circumstances of the escaped criminal's trial and sentence were dug up by some clever reporter, who made a romantic Thanksgiving story out of it, and worked in a reference to Jim and myself (as the scheme of the proposed elopement had somehow leaked out; though no one ever guessed that I had a hand in the escape), and a most affecting description of the absent sweetheart of the man who had so unexpectedly escaped a living death and a wave of sympathy swept over the whole community in that glad holiday time, so the search was carried on in a half-hearted sort of way, and nothing was ever heard of the missing "No. 67."

Three months later Jim and I were married. One the eve of our wedding a package postmarked "Paris," with customs paid, arrived for Jim. When we opened it, there was the old raincoat, and in the pocket a box addressed to me in a delicate feminine hand, with the words, "May you have the great happiness you sent to me," and inside was a magnificent diamond sunburst. In an envelope also written across the outside in masculine chirography, we read,

"TO JIM AND HIS WIFE—GOD BLESS YOU BOTH."

In Prussia 5,010 men and 1,349 women committed suicide in 1899.

In New Orleans last year 78 persons died from the effects of gunshot wounds.

One of the streets in Canton, China, is occupied entirely by druggists and dentists. The name of the thoroughfare is quite appropriate—Physic street.

King Leopold of Belgium owns a motor car of 40 horse power, the Emperor William one of 35 horse power, the Czar of Russia one of 300 horse power and the King of England, Portugal and Italy each one of 12 horse power.

Some of the wooden churches of Norway are fully 700 years old, and are still in excellent state of preservation. Their timbers have successfully resisted the frosty and almost Arctic winters because they have been repeatedly coated with tar.

A worn or soiled Bank of England note is seldom seen. This is because no note of this bank is ever released by the establishment when cashed, it is kept and put aside for destruction. The average term during which a note remains in circulation is about a month.

David Evans, who recently died in Carmarthenshire, Wales, loved to witness executions, and collected many relics of murderers. When Calcraft, the public hangman, died, Evans applied for the job, but was refused. He set up a gallows in his own house, and it was his habit to invite his friends to test the noose.

The strongest animals exist entirely on vegetable food. It is the ferocity of the lion rather than his strength that makes him formidable. An elephant is a match for several lions, and is a vegetarian. The animals with most speed and endurance—the horse, the reindeer, the antelope and others—are also vegetarians.

MEN TREATED FREE.

This Offer Is Given to Prove the Superiority of My Treatment Over All Others, and Will Never Be Given Again. It Includes Medicine for All Diseases